

# **FACTORS AFFECTING MARITIME STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS IN MARITIME ENGLISH**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated and described factors affecting the achievements of maritime students in learning English and was concerned with four factors that are believed to be closely related to learning English. They are family background, orientation, beliefs and learning experiences. The qualitative descriptive method was used for doing this study. The subject of this study was two nautical classes in the fourth semester in 2014/15 at the Malahayati Merchant Marine College at Durung, Aceh Besar District, on the north coast of Aceh about 22 km, east of Banda Aceh. The instrument used for collecting the data was a questionnaire with 17 items, comprising both open ended and closed questions. In addition, interviews were conducted to clarify the data from the questionnaire. The data from the questionnaire were coded, grouped, classified and concluded. The achievements of the students in learning ESL were affected by four factors, viz: (i) family background, which covered the students' origins and their parents' level of education, (ii) beliefs, (iii) orientation, and (iv) learning experiences. Of these four factors, belief was the most important one.

**Keywords:** *Learning Factors, Maritime Students' Achievements, English.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia is one of the largest maritime countries in the world with the fifth largest maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that contains

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critical sea-lanes of communication for seaborne trade, naval movements and other maritime interests. Therefore, seafarers are needed to work on ships for shipping companies. In the international maritime labor market, multicultural and multilingual seafarers working in shipping need a common language for communications. As a result, the International Maritime Organization (IMO), in 1995, adopted English as the official language of the maritime industry.

However, the IMO statistics show that 80% of accidents at sea are caused by communication failures driven by poor standards of maritime English. Hence, maritime colleges or colleges to train merchant navy officers generally must take into account the quality of cadets for the global seafarers' community and hence ensure that their cadets should be proficient in understanding and using English properly, especially maritime English, which is essential for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), for protecting ship's property, for pollution prevention and for proper commands and ship operations as stated in SOLAS 2004.

To meet the required standardized competence in English, all maritime education and training, all over the world, must adopt the international curriculum issued and legalized for the Standard Training Certification for Watch Keeping for Seafarers (STCW 2010). As stated in the STCW 2010 curriculum for elementary level, all graduates must have adequate knowledge of both written and spoken English. Therefore, the maritime education and training graduates are required to have a good standard of English competency. They must be able to understand and read marine charts, nautical publications, meteorological information, messages concerning the ship's safety and operations and must have adequate skills to communicate with others ships and coastal stations.

In the Indonesian shipping school context, the ideal goals and objectives of the STCW 2010 curriculum have not been optimally achieved (Dirgayasa, 2014). Besides, Risuandi (2009) cited by Dirgayasa (2014) has emphasized that students and graduates of Maritime English and training generally have low competency in Maritime English. He also added that (Indonesian) graduates always find they have difficulty in joining international shipping companies because of their poor standard of English, both written and spoken.

Furthermore, the *Malahayati* Merchant Marine College, a maritime college operating in Aceh under the Ministry of Transportation expects that their cadets should become excellent seafarers with high global standards of competency. *Malahayati* Merchant Marine College at

Durung, Aceh Besar District, on the north coast of Aceh 22 km east of Banda Aceh, teaches English as one of the professional subjects, like their other maritime subjects such as maritime law, ship handling and so forth. They aim for students to achieve adequate competitive English skills to meet the standard requirements for the international maritime labor market.

Thus, Maritime English is being taught as a subject in *Malahayati Merchant Marine College* for 2 to 4 hours a week for nautical and engineering majors. The syllabus for Maritime English was prepared based on the IMO model course no. 3.17. This was done to ensure that the trainees develop their full knowledge and strong proficiency in English as required by the STCW code. Besides that, General English is also taught as an extracurricular subject for two to five hours a week in order to give the cadets more chance to learn and practice English.

Yet in the process of achieving this aim, the students still had low scores in recent semesters. In fact the mean score did not meet the minimum standard score (KKM) of 70. The cadets' mean score was only about 50, far below what it should be. Based on some preliminary research, the writer found that the cadets faced some problems in learning English. The first evidence pertained to their poor grammar such as their inability to use verb tenses correctly as well as their inadequate vocabulary in particular to understand the large range of maritime terminology in English. In addition, the student's geographic background also impeded their striving to learn better since most of them were from rural areas. Although, most of the cadets hope to become either regional or international seafarers, they did not like to study English as a subject. Besides, this college puts both junior and senior high school graduates into the same level of class. This creates problems up until today.

Based on the situation above the writer believed that the cadets needed to improve their achievements in English for maritime purposes. Their poor performance might be caused by various factors. In short, this study was concerned with four factors that are believed to be closely related to learning English, particularly Maritime English. These factors are (i) family background, (ii) beliefs, (iii) orientation and (iv) learning experiences. Therefore, this study was aimed at investigating and describing the factors that affect the level of achievement in English of the maritime students at *Malahayati Merchant Marine College (Balai Pendidikan dan Pelatihan Ilmu Pelayaran Malahayati Aceh)*.

### **Research Question**

1. What are the factors that affect the maritime students' achievement in Maritime English?

### **Research Objective**

1. To find out the factors that affect the maritime students' achievement in Maritime English.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Factors that Affect Students' Achievements in English**

In developing countries, a number of researchers have argued that school environment and learning experiences were more important factors for students' achievement than their home environment (Golam, 2012). In other words, teachers and the teaching learning process were dominant factors that affected the achievements of students more than their family background. Furthermore, Craig (2001) too, concurs that good ESL teachers are those who are knowledgeable in their subject, know how to explain the subject matter to learners and how to vary the ways in which they teach to suit learners in their ESL classes to keep them interested and to motivate them highly. Moreover, Legotle (2005), in his research, found that some teachers were in the habit of coming late to school or missing lessons which considerably reduced the time for instruction. Then, in his opinion, lack of teacher discipline, commitment and morale were some of the major reasons for poor performance of learners in EFL.

Besides, in the teaching-learning processes, textbooks are needed for instructional material in order to help learners achieve the goal. Heyneman and Jamison (1980) noted the importance of the availability of textbooks and other books and writings in English. Therefore, it is important to create a good language-learning environment, providing materials and resources for self-study and teachers need to stimulate the desire of students to learn the language.

However, according to Grissmer (2003) cited in Kainuwa (2013), the parents' level of education can be the most important factor affecting students' academic achievements. This, according to him, is because the parents are in a good position to be second teachers to their children; they can guide and counsel their children on the best way to perform well in education.

In Cheers's (1990) point of view, the learners' origin can affect the students' academic performance. He says that students from rural areas are more likely to have lower educational outcomes in terms of academic performance than students from metropolitan areas. Golam (2012) argues that the students from Narayangan (an urban area) achieved better English than those from Bhola (a rural area).

However, Krashen (1982) contends that learners with self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are well equipped for success in second language acquisition. Littlewood (1996) claims that knowledge, skill and confidence are closely linked to successful learning. The more knowledge and skills the students possess, the more confident they are likely to feel when they are asked to perform independently. Consequently, the more confident they feel, the more they are likely to be able to perform effectively.

Furthermore, Brownlee et al. (2002) have stated that belief can lead someone to behave in a way that reflects their understandings. Beliefs about EFL and learning are often described as personal opinions, perceptions or thoughts about people (e.g. teachers, classmates), situations (e.g. classroom activities, classroom interactions) and events (e.g. EFL teaching and learning) (Banya & Cheng, 1997).

While, Artini (2011) in her paper mentioned age as another important variable because it directly relates to development of the brain, emotional development, and social experience, this is represented in specialized prior knowledge and in personal styles of thought and work during learning.

Besides, orientation in thought is one of the factors that influence success or failure in learning a foreign language. Brown (2008) defines orientation as the means to achieve certain language goals. The degree of influence of each orientation depends on the individual learner, their context of education, cultural environment and social interaction.

Based on the literature above, factors that affect achievement can be summarized into two common groups. Artini (2011) has mentioned that physiological and environmental factors are believed to be influential in the success or failure of learning a foreign language. Physiological factors are the factors that are considered to be possessed by any learner either prior to or after the learning has taken place. These factors are commonly referred to as anxiety, orientation, beliefs, aptitudes, perceptions, expectations, and strategies for learning. On the other hand, environmental factors are those factors that come from the outside which also play important roles in the success of learning the

target language. These include variability of input, quality of instruction and the relationship between the learner and his teacher.

### **Maritime English in the Context of Language Learning**

Hutchinson and Water (1987) have stated that English for Special Purposes (ESP) is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning. ESP is also defined to meet the specific needs of learners for use in specific work situations (Dudley–Evans, 1998). This fits well with the concept of Maritime English as part of the syllabus within the education of ships' officers, whose admission requirements include, among other qualifications, practical experience from work on board ships (as cited by Pettersen, 2010).

He has argued that the major difference between Maritime English and general English is that in Maritime English the proper use of tense, aspect, voice and modality is regarded as essential for successful on-board communication. While, general English is used as a universal language for general communications. Normally, ESP focusses more on teaching contextual language than on teaching general grammar and language structures (Pettersen, 2010). In the Maritime English context, the students are trained to be able to use what they learn in the ESP classroom in other relevant subjects and aspects of their studies.

Maritime English is a set of specialized sub-languages interacting among themselves to describe in the most appropriate manner all material and non-material aspects of maritime affairs. Furthermore, Maritime English vocabulary is hardly unique, it is partly a result of “shifts” in meaning (Pettersen, 2010). The following example illustrates this: “port” means an artificial harbor in general English and in Maritime English but “port” also means the left hand side of a ship or boat as a specific Maritime English term so “*turn 30 degrees to port*” is a specific command to the helmsman of a ship.

In the teaching-learning processes, Balabar (1995) has proposed that teaching ESP will be more effective and relevant when the materials are designed and taught by both the lecturer of English and a specialist. They, both have their own strengths and weaknesses to share. Furthermore, McDonough and Christopher (2005) as cited in Dirgayasa (2014) argue that the sources of information for developing learning materials must involve five parties, i.e. the students, the teachers, the stakeholders, the graduates or cadets, and also active and retired seamen. He adds that textbooks, handbooks, learning materials,

and other maritime publications must be available and accessible by the students. The current shortage of materials at the maritime college is not only a matter of concern at Indonesia maritime colleges but it is also a problem in international maritime colleges.

It is a fact that providing standard learning materials has been difficult to achieve. This condition has also been reported by Pritchard (2009). He has claimed that the real condition of existing materials for teaching at maritime colleges is a lack of standards for Maritime English course books, a poor supply of textbooks for international use, and a lack of related learning resources.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study used qualitative research methods. Qualitative descriptive research focuses on non-statistical methods of inquiry and analysis of social problems. Qualitative research is concerned with the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals producing subjective data (Hancock, 1998). This study was designed to closely investigate the factors that affected the achievements of the cadets in learning English particularly Maritime English by using a questionnaire. To back-up data from the questionnaire, the writer also interviewed the English instructor.

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this research was the cadets at BP2IP *Malahayati* Aceh consisting of two majors totalling 267 cadets. However, the nautical major consisting of 2 classes with 40 students, was taken as the sample for this study since most accidents at sea are related to human error mainly triggered by poor communications and communications is especially the responsibility of the officer-on-deck department (Ziarati, 2006).

### **Research Instruments**

The writer gave each of the sample cadets a questionnaire in order to get information about each cadet's origins, orientation, beliefs toward English and their past learning experiences. Another tool used in this research was interviews which were aimed to clarify information gathered from the questionnaire.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In related to the achievements, there are some factors that support the students' achievements in English, particularly Maritime English. From the findings from the questionnaire there was a big range in the ages of the cadets from 17 to 24 years old. Six cadets were aged between 19 to 20, 4 out of 40 were aged 23 – 24 years old. The majority of cadets (20) were aged 21 – 22 plus there were another 10 cadets aged 17 to 18, who had only graduated from junior high school. The rest, 30 cadets had graduated from senior high school, 35 were male and 5 were female. Based on the cadets' responses, most of them, 29, came from villages, 8 out of the 40 came from the district capital of their district/regency, and only 3 originally lived in Banda Aceh, the capital city of the province. The cadets from the cities got test scores above 70 compared to those from the villages who all got scores below 60. Most of the cadets in the nautical classes came from villages while most of their parents had graduated from senior high school (27). The parents of 6 cadets had a university degree and 2 had finished post-graduate studies. Moreover, there were six cadets whose parents had only finished junior high school. 3 out of the 4 cadets who achieved the minimum standard score (KKM) had parents that had graduated from senior high school. One cadet out of those 4 had a parent with a university degree. In addition, the parents of those 4 cadets were employees and 2 out of those 4 cadets had relatives who were seafarers, but only 1 of them said that he had been introduced to Maritime English terminology. Moreover, those 4 cadets were all from urban areas.

Furthermore, most recognized English as an interesting subject (22). While, 5 cadets said that English was easy. Out of the rest, 8 cadets identified English as a difficult subject and 5 said it was not interesting. In addition, most of these cadets, 26 in all, attended every meeting. Four cadets did not attend the English classes for two days in the last month before the questionnaire, followed by one who missed once in the last month and 3 cadets who never followed the English lessons in the last month. Then, most of the cadets, 27, said that English is very important for them as seafarers and 10 others claimed that English is important. In responding to item no.10, there were 3 cadets who did not know whether English was important for seafarers or not. By contrast, when asked about "the subject they liked most", it was surprising that more than half of the participants, 27, chose the



maritime subject as their favorite subject rather than English (10). Further detail can be seen in Table 1 which follows:

**Table 1. Cadets Favorite Subject**

	English	Maritime subjects	Maths	Others
Cadets favorite subject	10	27	3	0

In terms of the cadets' perspective towards the teaching by the English instructor 15 said the English instructor rarely attended the class and 11 out of 40 cadets said that the English instructor was not disciplined in teaching. However, 14 cadets said that English instructor was disciplined in teaching. This can be seen in Table 2, which shows the cadets' opinion toward their English instructor.

**Table 2. Cadets' Perspective toward English Instructor in Teaching**

	Very disciplined	Disciplined	Less disciplined	Other
Cadets' Perspective towards English Instructor	0	14	11	15

Furthermore, in the line of practicing English in their daily life, 32 cadets said that they had never practiced English out of the classroom. Briefly, it can be mentioned that 22 of the 40 cadets were interested in English and 27 of them stated that English was very important for them. However, 30 did not choose English as their favorite subject. Furthermore, 26 said that the instructor rarely attended the classroom. Notably, 8 cadets who chose English as their favorite subject and who practiced speaking English outside the classroom achieved scores above 65.

Among the participants 25 said they needed English to get a job. Besides, six cadets learned English to prepare for tests and another six learnt English for studying abroad. In line with the test scores, 2 out of

4 cadets who scored above 70 said that they wanted to get a better job and the rest learnt English only as a means to continue their studies.

Referring to Balabar's opinion in the literature review that teaching ESP will be more effective and relevant when the materials are designed and taught by both the lecturer of English and a specialist, the respondents were asked who was more appropriate to teach maritime English, the Maritime English instructor, a subject instructor, or a native speaker. The results show that the cadets would prefer to have collaborative teaching between their English instructor and a maritime instructor who understands and speaks English, 18 cadets said they would prefer to have such team teaching. Ten of the cadets said that the subject instructors should be more qualified than the Maritime English instructor and 3 wanted to be taught by a native speaker.

A textbook is one of the basic materials for learning a language, half of the 40 respondents said that they had a textbook for English, while the other half said that they did not. The last question was designed to find out the cadets' sources for maritime terminology: 20 cadets reported that they got the terms from the maritime subject while 13 said that they got the English maritime terms from the Maritime English subject. Another 5 cadets said that bridge simulator training was their source for additional maritime English terminologies and the rest (2) got the terms from a maritime subject textbook.

## **Discussion**

Based on the cadets' answers, it was found that there were many more males than females. It is not surprising that males predominated at a marine college because life at sea is very hard which might not be attractive to women. In addition, the Balai Pendidikan dan Pelatihan Ilmu Pelayaran (BP2IP) in Indonesia allows a diverse range of ages to enroll. Based on these findings, 10 cadets had only graduated from junior high school. Moreover, both junior and senior high school graduates were placed in the same class. This consequently affected their achievements as those who had only passed junior high school had a different level of prior knowledge and ability to absorb information than those who had passed senior high school. This is represented in specialized prior knowledge of thought and work during learning. Nunan (1999) furthermore adds that the knowledge that learners carry in their heads helps them to interpret new material at a functional level.

In fact, the success of learning does not merely depend on the existence of knowledge and intellectual competence; it is also affected

by psychological and environmental factors as well. This study was concerned with four factors that are believed to have a close relationship with learning English, particularly Maritime English. These factors are (i) family background, (ii) beliefs, (iii) orientation, and (iv) previous learning experiences.

In the family background factor, the cadets' residence and level of parents' education seems to affect their achievements. The data from the questionnaire clearly showed that the majority of cadets came from villages, while most of their parents had graduated from senior high school. However, cadets from rural villages got worse scores than those from urban areas. Those who came from rural villages got scores below 60 while those who came from a city got scores above 70. The results from this study are similar to those from Dirgayasa's research in 2014 which found that family background and orientation were dominant factors that affected the achievement of cadets at three private maritime education training schools in Indonesia. In addition, these results support the statement of Cheers (1990), who wrote that students from non-metropolitan areas are more likely to have lower educational outcomes in terms of academic performance than students from metropolitan areas.

Furthermore, 30 of the sample cadets did not like the Maritime English lessons and only 10 out of 40 cadets liked the Maritime English lessons the most. 32 of them did not practice English in their daily life: whereas English as a foreign language is different from other subjects, it needs self-direction in seeking opportunities to use the language in daily life (Artini, 2011). Furthermore, the data showed that the cadets whose favorite subject was English achieved better scores compared to those whose favorite was not English. Those who chose English as their favorite subject achieved scores above 65 and were in the groups of successful or very successful cadets. Moreover, the cadets who practiced English outside the classroom achieved better scores as well. They too achieved scores above 65.

The cadets generally had positive beliefs toward English. Most of them (22) were interested in English and English was very important for them (27). It can be seen from the frequency they attended the classroom in the most recent month. Most of them (26) attended every meeting. Yet, still most of them did not achieve the minimum standard score as required by their curriculum. This is probably because they do not like English as a subject and did not practice speaking English outside the classroom. As stated by Normazidah et al. (2012) one of the

factors that affect the EFL learners to have poor performance in English language learning is lack of attempts to use English in the environment and in the community. In addition, it was revealed by the answers to items nos. 10 and 13 on the questionnaire that only 10 cadets liked English as a subject most did not and only 8 cadets spoke English outside of the classroom.

Moreover, the Maritime English instructor rarely attended the classes as the cadets mentioned on the questionnaire. Based on the interview with the English instructor, she stated that besides teaching Maritime English she had administrative work to do as well. In Legotle's (2005) opinion, lack of educator discipline, commitment and morale were some of the major reasons for poor learner performance in ESL and EFL. In other words, the quality and performance of instructors and their teaching-learning processes will affect the students' achievements as well.

In this study, most of the cadets (25) learnt English as a means to fulfill job requirements in international shipping companies. Those cadets indicated that their orientation for learning English was to fulfill job requirements. 2 out of the 4 cadets who scored above 70 were those who wanted to get the best jobs and the rest learnt English as part of their duties to continue their studies. Both those orientations are factors that lead to success in learning English; the degree of influence of each orientation depends on the individual learner, the educational context, the cultural environment and on social interactions (Brown, 2008).

However, both specialized subject instructors and the English subject instructors are responsible for successful ESP. Hence, the research showed that the cadets preferred to have collaborative teaching between the English lecturer and the maritime lecturers who understand English. This condition is not actually surprising because a theoretical perspective states that collaborative teaching is much better than individual teaching for teaching ESP. Balabar (1995) has stated that teaching ESP will be more effective and relevant when materials are designed and taught by both the lecturer of English and the specialist lecturer. They both have their own strengths and weaknesses to share.

In addition, the findings showed that half the cadets did not have the appropriate maritime English textbook. Half of the participants mentioned that the maritime subject was their main learning source. It was revealed in the data interview with the English instructor that she had to find teaching-learning materials from the internet or other sources. Moreover, a lack of standard learning materials at maritime

colleges is seemingly not only a problem at Indonesia maritime college but it is also an international problem. Pritchard (2009) has claimed that the real condition of teaching materials at maritime colleges is a lack of standard Maritime English course books, a poor supply of textbooks for international use, and a lack of related learning resources.

Besides the factors above, there is another particular factor that can affect the achievements in English. From the data interview with the English instructor, this college is a boarding college that involves the cadets in many physical activities out of class hours. As a result, the students might be physically tired when they get to school and also in the evenings when they could practice ESL for homework and hence they may not be in optimum condition for learning as stated by Artini (2011).

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Achievements in learning English can be affected by several factors that foreign language teachers and learners should be aware of. In this case, the cadets did not speak English outside the classroom and lacked confidence to use the language because they are afraid to be shamed if they make mistakes. The cadets' origins and parents' educational levels are dominant factors that have affected their achievements in ESL. The data showed that the cadets from urban areas achieved better scores than those from rural areas. Besides, Balai Pendidikan dan Pelatihan Ilmu Pelayaran (BP2IP) in Indonesia allows a diverse range of ages to enrol so that both junior high school and senior high school graduates are placed in the same classes. So students with different prior levels of knowledge and hence different ability to absorb new materials are in the same class.

However, most of the cadets have positive beliefs. English is very important for them as future seafarers to get a better job in the international shipping labor market. This is one of the factors that encourages them to learn English. The findings showed that the majority of the cadets were learning English as a means to fulfill the requirements to get a better job. The cadets whose favorite subject was English got better scores than those whose favorite was not English. This college however is a boarding college that provides many opportunities for physical activities in the recreation areas attached to

the dormitories. As a result, the dormitories are not optimum facilities for supporting intellectual learning processes.

### Suggestions

Based on the findings above the writer suggests that the cadets should have better learning conditions. The cadets should be encouraged to practice English language both inside and outside their classrooms. Their learning materials should be properly selected. Lack of textbooks and materials can lead the cadets to become outdated seafarers even before they start because they have not been able to keep up with the latest developments in the shipping industry, not to mention new technical terms. In addition, it is suggested to *Malahayati* Merchant Marine College to provide many more appropriate textbooks plus internet access. Besides, it is suggested to the teacher to find the best ways to teach the cadets who have different prior knowledge, different backgrounds and different beliefs.

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